

**“A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING THE THREAT OF IRANIAN WMD
TERRORISM AGAINST THE UNITED STATES”**

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**“WMD TERRORISM AND PROLIFERANT STATES”
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I. Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Linder, Ranking Member Langevin and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the potential threat of Iranian WMD terrorism against the United States. As we approach the fourth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, we are sadly reminded of the tragic costs of underestimating our adversaries. It is against this backdrop that we must continue to strengthen our efforts to anticipate emerging threats against the United States.

The first part of my testimony suggests that the Islamic Republic of Iran stands at a dangerous nexus of deep hostility towards the United States, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and international terrorism. It is only prudent that we consider the risk that Iran might one day undertake or sponsor a WMD terrorist attack against the United States, and I provide several examples of scenarios for such an attack.

To help assess whether and under what circumstances Iran might engage in such behavior, I then propose a framework that considers on one hand possible impediments, and on the other hand possible enablers or inducements, to Iranian WMD attack on the United States. Finally, I suggest a number of implications of this threat for U.S. national security planning.

II. The Iranian Threat Nexus

International Terrorism

International terrorism has been a cornerstone of Iranian policy since the inception of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Terrorism is seen as a legitimate policy tool by Iran's ruling clerics, although they do not refer to it as such. Instead, they try to cloak it in more politically acceptable terms of "resistance" and "export of the revolution." The goals of Iran's terrorism are to advance Tehran's influence and desire for regional hegemony, in the hopes of creating like-minded theocracies in the region, and eliminating opposition to the regime by liquidating dissidents wherever they may be.

Domestic politics has had an important influence on the scope and timing of Iranian terrorist attacks. In the 1980s, for example, extremist factions in Tehran launched a new wave of terrorist attacks against Western and Israeli targets in a bid to embarrass and outmaneuver their more pragmatic domestic rivals. The pragmatists, for their part, had advocated merely a pause in Iranian-sponsored terror attacks in order to ease Iran's diplomatic isolation and replenish arms needed to continue the war against Iraq.

A hallmark of Iranian terrorism is the cultivation and reliance on foreign Shia extremist groups to do Tehran's bidding. Iran was largely responsible for the creation of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been training and equipping Hezbollah terrorists for decades. Hezbollah, which has a global presence, has been described by senior US Government officials as a far more capable organization than al Qaeda. In 2002, a Hezbollah fund raising cell was uncovered in North Carolina, and the FBI was reported to be

investigating about 20 other potential Hezbollah cells in the United States. Hezbollah had killed more Americans than any other terrorist group until September 11th.

Iran has courted al Qaeda over the years, apparently willing to set aside Shia-Sunni religious differences in common pursuit of toppling moderate Arab states, the destruction of Israel, and the withdrawal of the US presence in the Middle East. As detailed by the 9-11 Commission Report, Iran provided training to al Qaeda operatives in the early 1990s, helping them to become proficient in the manufacture of car bombs, which they have used so effectively against US and Western targets worldwide. Iran maintains an ambiguous relationship with al Qaeda, either “detaining” or “hosting” a number of senior al Qaeda operatives who fled Afghanistan, reportedly including Bin Laden’s son.

Other terrorist proxies of Iran include Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, and Hamas. Hamas has made crude attempts to introduce poisons into its suicide bombs since the late 1990s. Overall, the use of such proxies enables Iran to advance its goals through the use of force without the risk of direct reprisals from stronger powers.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Iran has been pursuing WMD since the 1980s, in contravention of its numerous nonproliferation treaty obligations. In response to Saddam Hussein’s use of chemical weapons during the 1980-1988 war with Iran, Tehran launched its own chemical warfare (CW) effort and used such weapons against Iraq, although it steadfastly denies this. The State Department recently declared that, “...Iran is in violation of its [Chemical Warfare Convention] obligations because Iran is acting to retain and modernize key elements of its CW infrastructure to include an offensive CW R&D capability and dispersed mobilization facilities.”

Likewise, Iran is an original signatory of the Biological Weapons Convention, yet is believed to have an active biological warfare program masked within its civilian pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.

Since the 2002 revelation of secret facilities in Iran to enrich uranium and produce heavy water, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has uncovered a large-scale nuclear program in Iran that dates back to the 1980s. Much of this program, including the separation of plutonium and the enrichment of uranium, was deliberately hidden from the IAEA in contravention of Iran’s safeguards agreement under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Of particular note is Iran’s acquisition of uranium enrichment technology and equipment from the A.Q. Khan network, which provided similar assistance and actual nuclear weapon designs to Libya.

Since the cover was blown on its clandestine nuclear program, Iran has reacted with the same “cheat and retreat” tactics Iraq used to conceal its nuclear weapons program from UN inspectors after the 1990 Gulf War. In numerous instances, Iran has understated its nuclear

activities, only acknowledging their wider scope when presented with irrefutable evidence to the contrary by IAEA officials.

This pattern of deception, denial, and delay has served Iran well, helping it to avoid international sanctions for the past three years. Indeed, Iran has met international calls to constrain its nuclear program with steadfast defiance.

This defiance belies a determination to attain a nuclear weapons capability. Tehran has numerous motivations to get the bomb, spanning prestige, security, hegemonic, and domestic political concerns. Should they succeed in acquiring nuclear weapons, Iran's mullah's are likely to become emboldened on both the international and domestic political fronts.

Hostility Towards the United States

Hatred of the United States has been the mantra of Iran's theocracy since its inception. That hostility derives from a broader anti-colonial sentiment, resentment of US intervention in Iranian domestic politics in the early-1950s, support of the monarchy, a perceived "tilt" toward Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, and subsequent US efforts to isolate the Islamic Republic, including technology denial. The leadership's enmity stands in contrast to broad segments of the Iranian populace, particularly the post-Khomeini generation, which has a more favorable view of the United States.

The mullah's hostility toward the United States is manifest in the 1980-81 Tehran embassy hostage crisis, as well as numerous terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hezbollah and other proxies at Tehran's behest, which resulted in the deaths and wounding of hundreds of US citizens. In addition, Iran has orchestrated deadly attacks against US military forces, including the bombing of the US Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 and the bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996.

Many of Iran's extremists harbor a fatalistic vision of "inevitable" conflict with the United States. Iranian leaders have long since concluded that a direct confrontation with the United States on our terms would spell certain defeat for Tehran. As former defense minister Akbar Torkan explained in 1993:

“Can our air force...take on the Americans, or our navy take on the American navy? If we put all our country's budget into such a war we would have just burned our money. The way to go about dealing with such a threat requires a different solution entirely.”

In touting Iran's new asymmetric warfare doctrine against the United States last fall, IRGC Commander Rahim-Safavi warned that, “They know full well that if they start an onslaught against us, we will not be confined to our land borders and that we will attack them outside the boundaries of our land borders.”

In short, Iran's hostility towards the United States, institutionalized use of terrorist proxies, and large-scale investments in asymmetric weapons capabilities and doctrine, provide a

disturbing picture of what might one day converge in a WMD terrorist attack against the United States.

III. What Possible Forms of Involvement?

Before turning to the framework, it is useful to consider the various ways in which Iran might become involved in WMD terrorism. Among the possibilities are the following scenarios, arranged in order from lesser to greater awareness and sanction by Iran's ruling elite:

- Zealots and profiteers in Iran's WMD, scientific, and industrial communities engage in an A.Q. Khan-like WMD black market for terrorist groups
- Rogue elements within the IRGC, which plays a key role both in Iran's WMD programs and terrorist operations, orchestrate a WMD terrorist attack
- Iran provides terrorist groups with advice on how to procure WMD technology, equipment, and materials
- Iran provides WMD to terrorist proxies and trains them to carry out specified attacks
- Iran uses its own IRGC/intelligence operatives to carry out a deliberate, covert WMD attack.

The list is by no means exhaustive, and analysts have different views as to the likelihood of each scenario. Still, it is essential to develop initially a broad list of potential threat scenarios, evaluate the factors which could make them more or less likely, and develop intelligence indicators that might signal shifts that could make one scenario more or less likely than another.

IV. A Framework for Assessing the Risk of Iranian WMD Terrorism

To date, there are no public indications that Iran has engaged in WMD terrorism. Consequently, it may be useful to think about the issue in terms of the political, security, and economic considerations that prevent Iran from engaging in such behavior, as well as shifts which may enable it.

Impediments to Involvement in WMD Terrorism

A. Political

Iranian involvement in WMD terrorism, if discovered or inferred, would carry substantial political costs for the ruling clerics. It would undo years of effort to end Iran's isolation and stabilize its economy. Such involvement would fly in the face of various Iranian religious edicts and policy pronouncements, including Ayatollah Khamene'i's declaration shortly after the September 11th attacks that, "Killing of people in any place and with any kind of weapons, including atomic bombs, long-range missiles, biological or chemical weapons, passenger or war planes, carried out by any organization, country, or individuals is condemned." Official

complicity in WMD terrorism would likely spell the end of Khamene'i's rule – whose legitimacy as the Supreme Leader of Iran is already on weak footing – whether the result of internal or external pressures.

Those external pressures could be immense and, increasingly, multilateral. In particular, UN Security Council Resolution 1540, which was recently adopted by consensus, requires all states to, "...refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery." The new International Convention on Nuclear Terrorism, also adopted by consensus in the UN General Assembly, will open for signature next week and place additional obligations on states. These developments underscore the growing international intolerance of state-sponsored WMD terrorism. Whether Iran will take heed of this norm will probably hinge upon the consequences of violating it, since Tehran also signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Warfare Convention, and the Biological Warfare Convention and appears to have violated all three.

Short of leadership or broader regime change, turning over WMD to terrorist proxies, who maintain their own agendas and degree of independence, could potentially give such groups greater political leverage over Tehran. They could, for example, use the weapons in ways other than those intended by Iranian leaders. They might also blackmail Tehran into meeting certain demands or risk public exposure of the WMD transfer.

B. Security

As suggested above, the risk of international retribution, including military attack against Iran's WMD-related infrastructure and possibly regime change, likely exercises a strong restraining influence over possible Iranian consideration of engaging in WMD terrorism. Such involvement might open a "Pandora's box" of another sort, inspiring regime opponents like the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq to acquire WMD and use them in their campaign to unseat the mullahs, a concern reflected by Iranian officials and academics.

C. Economic

Approximately 80 percent of Iran's foreign income is derived from the sale of its oil and natural gas. This dependency, and the potential for its exploitation by a punitive international oil embargo, presumably exercises some degree of restraint on the more risky forms of Iranian behavior, such as involvement in WMD terrorism.

Possible Enablers/Inducements to Engage in WMD Terrorism

A. Political

It is important to consider the range of political developments that might erode Iran's reluctance to engage in WMD terrorism. For example, should Israel and the Palestinians appear to be making tangible progress toward a peaceful settlement, it is possible that Iran might try to derail the process by dramatically escalating the level of violence. Use of WMD by Palestinian

rejectionist groups would certainly provide such a “shock” and goad the Israeli military into a massive crack-down that would put a halt to a negotiated solution.

It is also possible that extremists within Iran’s formal and informal ruling circles might once again initiate a wave of international terrorist attacks to counter any perceived challenges from more pragmatic factions in Tehran, as they did in the 1980s. WMD terrorist attacks by Islamic proxies against Western interests would certainly exacerbate tensions with Iran and politically isolate any faction that might have been seeking a rapprochement with Washington.

Another possibility is simple bureaucratic momentum. As mentioned above, the IRGC’s WMD and terrorism roles might one day conflate in unanticipated ways. In this regard, it is important to note the IRGC’s relative lack of religious oversight, compared to, say, Iran’s regular military forces.

B. Security

Developments in the security realm might likewise undermine Iranian reluctance to engage in WMD terrorism. Consistent with its asymmetric strategy, Iran may wish to remind its main adversaries (i.e., the United States and Israel) of their vulnerabilities by subjecting them to a symbolic WMD attack by proxy. The overall goal may be to deter any pre-emptive strikes against Iran’s WMD infrastructure – in essence, an asymmetric “shot across the bow.”

Should Iran succeed in producing fissile material, developing nuclear weapons, and mating them to long-range delivery systems, Iranian foreign policy could be expected to become more assertive generally. In the perhaps mistaken confidence that such a capability would then preclude future retaliation against Iran, Tehran’s leaders might be more inclined to support WMD terrorism.

C. Economic

In spite of its dependency on oil and natural gas exports to keep the Iranian economy afloat, Iran’s mullahs may be less inhibited to engage in WMD terrorism if they believed that an international oil embargo could be averted by shrewd exploitation of the ever increasing international demand for energy. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Iran has recently deepened its energy ties with China, signing contracts to supply Beijing with natural gas for the next 25 years and to develop the Yadaravan oil field, deals worth an estimated \$200 billion. The mullahs likely view China’s growing dependency on Iranian oil and natural gas as a means of securing Beijing’s veto in the event Iran faces UN Security Council sanctions, be it for pushing its nuclear program or other objectionable activity such as involvement in WMD terrorism.

IV. Implications

In the end, whether Iran would engage in WMD terrorism probably depends on three factors:

- the regime’s risk propensity – which is generally regarded as low but not “zero”;

- its perception that the benefits of such involvement significantly outweigh the costs; and
- how well the mullahs can control WMD programs and terrorist operations within the IRGC and other organizations elsewhere in the regime.

What I have attempted to demonstrate is that it is possible to conceive of situations that might result in a higher Iranian risk propensity, a more favorable cost-benefit calculus, and a greater possibility of involvement in WMD terrorism than currently appears to exist. Undoubtedly, analysts will hold different views on these issues. If we are to succeed in correctly anticipating the emergence of an Iranian WMD terrorism threat, however, these hypotheses should continuously compete with one another as new intelligence is developed that might “narrow the field.”

Further, as a hedge against intelligence surprise, I believe that we should continue to move forward on other fronts, such as the development of a network to detect the smuggling of nuclear materials and devices into the United States. Such a network should be designed with a thinking, adaptive adversary – like Iran – in mind.

This concludes my prepared statement. With the Subcommittee’s permission, I request that my formal statement be submitted for the record. Chairman Linder, Congressman Langevin, and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for your attention and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.